

LOVING AS WE DO



Californ
regional
facility

& other Short Plays

GERTRUDE
ROBINS

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AS WE DO

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LOVING AS WE DO

AND OTHER PLAYS

BY
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LOVING AS WE DO

PRODUCED BY MISS HORNIMAN'S COMPANY,
GAIETY THEATRE, MANCHESTER

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

PETER DURHAM.

EVE WERRINGTON.

MANSERVANT.

LOVING AS WE DO

SCENE.—*Study in Peter Durham's chambers, Jermyn Street, W. Usual appointments of a well-to-do bachelor's room.*

At rise of curtain Peter is lounging in armchair by fire, smoking and casually looking through evening papers. At his elbow is a small table with tantalus, siphon and glass of whisky-and-soda. Peter is a well-groomed, youngish-looking man. After a few seconds telephone bell rings. He goes to instrument on his desk and takes up receiver.

PETER [*sharply*]. Hullo! Yes, this is Gerrard 16544. What? What do you say? I can't hear a word. I don't know who you are. There's such a confounded buzzing. Wait a minute, I'll get the line cleared. [*Jogs lever repeatedly.*] That's better. Who? [*Sudden change of tone.*] Oh, it's you, is it? Darling! How are you? What? That's good. Splendid. Jolly of you to ring me up. I was just feeling frightfully bored. H'm? What's that? Yes, all the evening. No, quite alone, not a soul. Rather! Can you? When? Now? I say, that's great. Right ho. I'll get rid of him straight away. Be quick, won't you? Don't

waste a minute, darling. Yes, yes, it will be quite all right. No, of course, I won't keep you waiting. Trust me. I say, I'll tell you what. I'll leave the hall door open so that you can come straight in. I'll be counting the seconds. Good-bye, sweetheart. Angel! [*Hangs up receiver and rings bell. Manservant enters.*]
Oh—er—Brooks, I shall be dining out to-night.

BROOKS. Yes, sir.

PETER. So—er—you needn't stay in.

BROOKS. Very good, sir.

PETER. Don't wait. You can go out now, at once.

BROOKS. Thank you, sir. [*Indicating tantalus, etc.*]

Shall I take these things away, sir, or bring another siphon?

PETER. Didn't I say I was going out? Take them away.

BROOKS. Yes, sir. [*Assembles glass, siphon, etc., on tray.*]

PETER. Hurry up. Be quick.

BROOKS. Certainly, sir. You'd like the fire made up perhaps, sir?

PETER. Oh, yes, but look sharp about it.

BROOKS. Yes, sir. [*Slowly makes up fire while Peter moves restlessly about room.*]

PETER [*suddenly turning round*]. I thought I told you to go out five minutes ago.

BROOKS. I'm just going, sir. [*Proceeds to tidy up room in a leisurely manner.*]

PETER. Damn it all, Brooks! Will you clear out?

BROOKS [*slightly aggrieved and holding up various periodicals, including Pink 'Un and Winning*

Post]. I thought you might like these papers removed, sir.

PETER. Oh, get out.

BROOKS. Yes, sir. Everything's quite in order now, sir, I think you'll find.

[Brooks exits with tray, etc. Peter watches him off, then stealthily goes to door, opens it and looks out carefully. Tiptoes out of room. After a few seconds returns. Proceeds to adjust his tie, hair, etc., and walks about room with a jaunty air, whistling cheerfully. Lifts blind and looks out of window two or three times. Outer door heard being shut. Room door opens and Eve Werrington enters. She is a well-dressed woman of between thirty and forty, beautiful and elated.]

EVE. Peter!

PETER *[turns round quickly]*. Eve! *[Hurries towards her.]* My darling! *[Takes her in his arms and kisses her.]*

EVE. Oh, Peter! *[Kisses him.]*

PETER. What an unexpected blessing. *[Kisses her.]*

EVE. It's been *such* a long time! *[Kisses him.]*

PETER *[holding her at arm's length]*. Ah!

EVE. Oh!

PETER. Eve!

EVE. Peter! *[They again embrace.]*

PETER. Well, come and sit down and get warm. Your hands are like icicles. First let's take these old rags off. *[Taking her cloak.]*

EVE *[laughing]*. You naughty boy! Why, it's quite new. Brand-new! *[Sits down by fire.]*

PETER. I don't care! I want to see *you*. Not all these old mummy wrappings. [*Puts cloak on chair and returns to Eve. Sits on arm of her chair.*]

EVE [*leaning against him*]. Oh, how comfy this is!

PETER. I think so!

EVE. Now tell me . . .

PETER. Everything!

EVE. Were you very surprised?

PETER. Rather!

EVE. But pleased?

PETER. Not the word for it. Sweetheart! [*Kisses her.*]

EVE. You dear thing!

PETER. How did you get away?

EVE. I'll tell you later. What a jolly fire! Oh, how good it is to be here again!

PETER. And oh, how good it is to see you here again!

EVE. Really?

PETER. —and truly!

EVE [*laughs*]. I'm so happy!

PETER. My Eve! My darling! My dearest! My very own blessing!

EVE. I am all that, am I, Peter?

PETER. All that and more—much more!

EVE. Oh, how nice!

PETER [*rising*]. What have you done to yourself this evening? You look ten years too young. So absurdly young, I believe you slipped out whilst Nursie wasn't looking!

EVE. Perhaps I did! Oh, Peter, I'm so hungry!

PETER. Mundane mortal!

EVE. I don't care. I am! And what's more,
you're going to take me out to dinner!

PETER. Do you mean it?

EVE. Yes.

PETER. Hooray! That's terrific! Where shall we
go?

EVE. Oh, somewhere rather—*rather*, I think!

PETER. Extravagant angel!

EVE. No, I'm not. But this evening—this even-
ing's extra special, Peter.

PETER. Oh, this evening's extra special, is it? Will
the Ritz do?

EVE [*nodding*]. Yes.

PETER [*sitting down on footstool at her feet*]. Getting
warmer now?

EVE. Oh, yes. So cosy. It is jolly here!

PETER. It's jolly having you here. I hate it when
you have to go.

EVE. Do you wish I'd stay?

PETER. You know I do.

EVE. For ever and a day?

PETER. Haven't I told you so hundreds of times?

EVE. That doesn't prove that you mean it.

PETER. You ought to be here—always.

EVE. You forget these are bachelor chambers.
I'd have to become invisible.

PETER. Invisible to all but me.

EVE. Oh, Peter! I wonder how long you'd go on
loving someone who was always with you, not
just there when you were feeling nice.

PETER. I should always feel nice when you were
here.

EVE. I wonder!

PETER. I don't. I know.

EVE. But, Peter boy, you know I'm very trying sometimes!

PETER. You wouldn't be—to me.

EVE. And oh, so exacting!

PETER. Not it!

EVE. What would you do when I lost my temper?

PETER. Kiss you till you found it again.

EVE. Tell me just what it is you love about me, Peter.

PETER. Everything!

EVE. Oh! [*pause*]. And what about when I get old and ugly?

PETER. You couldn't.

EVE [*rising*]. Kiss me, Peter. [*They kiss passionately.*]

PETER. My Eve! My own! You are my very own, aren't you?

EVE [*softly*]. Yes, Peter, all yours. I know it may be wrong, but—

PETER. It isn't wrong. It's beautiful. Loving as we do—

EVE. Loving as we do! Yes, that makes all the difference, doesn't it? That makes it right.

PETER. Of course it does. God! How I love you!

EVE. You do mean that, Peter, don't you?

PETER. You know it. You know you're the only woman in the world for me.

EVE. Say that again!

PETER [*slowly*]. You're the only woman in the world for me!

EVE. Then I'm glad I've done it!

PETER. Done what, my darling?

EVE. Taken the big step. Burnt my boats.

PETER [*slightly relaxing his hold*]. What do you mean, sweetheart?

EVE. I've done what you always wanted me to do.

PETER. What's that, my darling?

EVE. I've come to you to stay. I've come to you for good.

PETER [*letting one arm drop to his side*]. For good? I don't understand—

EVE [*smiling at him*]. Don't you? Try!

PETER. No, I'm sure I—I—quite fail to—to—er—

EVE. I've left my husband and come here to you.

PETER. Good God!

EVE. It was too awful going on acting that living lie. He doesn't love me. And you—you wanted me so much, and I—I wanted you.

PETER. Naturally. Of course. Quite so, but—

EVE. I've lain awake for nights trying to decide. I didn't want to be wicked. But—it seemed just as wicked to go on living with him. And then, he said something *horrid* at lunch. I forget now what it was exactly. But in that moment it came to me like a flash. I must leave him and come to you—to you who really wanted me.

PETER. I see—

EVE. We'll be so happy here together, Peter.

PETER [*uncomfortably*]. Yes, oh, yes. Rather.

EVE. Oh, I forgot! We can't stay here, can we?

PETER. No, of course not. Oh, no.

EVE. What a pity! I do love it so. Such a dear little flat!

PETER. Oh, I don't know. £300 a year. Do you call that dear?

EVE. Oh, you mustn't joke at a moment like this! I feel more like praying.

PETER. So do I!

EVE. Let's sit down again. There's no hurry now. And talk and talk and talk.

PETER. That's no good. Talking's no good. We'd better do something.

EVE. I believe *you're* getting hungry now.

PETER. No, I'm not. Never wanted a meal less in my life.

EVE. All right. The Ritz will wait.

PETER. The Ritz.

EVE. Yes. Now you know why it was to be such an extra special dinner.

PETER. It will be. [*With sudden alarm.*] But we can't go there. Not now.

EVE. Why not?

PETER. Why not? Good heavens! Why, people will see us!

EVE. What's that matter? We've been seen out together before.

PETER. Yes, but that was different. That was whilst you were living with your husband.

EVE. What difference does that make?

PETER. All the difference. All the difference in the world. We've got to be very careful now. Not be seen out together in public.

EVE. Oh, Peter, you're not *afraid*, are you?

PETER. Afraid! Absurd idea!

EVE. Well, it almost seems as though—

PETER. But one can't afford to be found out.

EVE [*looking hard at him*]. Peter! You haven't changed, have you?

PETER. Changed? Of course I've not changed.

EVE. It would be too awful, after giving up everything.

PETER. But I certainly think you might have consulted me. You appear to have acted very hastily.

EVE. Why, you know you've urged me heaps and heaps of times—

PETER. No, no, no, my dear Eve. Don't exaggerate. Not "urged" and not "heaps of times." I may have said—

EVE. Be careful! You can't go back on your word! You can't go back on me.

PETER [*peevishly*]. I don't wish to go back either on my word or on you. But we must just think what's the best thing to do.

EVE. There's nothing to think about. It's so simple. There's nothing to do. It's done!

PETER. That's just it. *Is it?*

EVE. Of course. The letter is on the hall table. My husband will be reading it any minute now.

PETER. Oh, will he?

EVE. Yes. Oh, I'd love to see him reading it. I almost wish I were there.

PETER. So do I!

EVE [*laughing*]. He'll be *furious*!

PETER. What do you think he will do?

EVE. Oh, I don't know. Come here perhaps, after me.

PETER [*alarmed*]. You didn't tell him you were coming here, to me?

EVE. Yes, I did. It's ever so much better to be straightforward. I told him how you and I had loved one another for months—

PETER. I trust he won't put a wrong construction on that.

EVE. And that, as he and I hadn't loved one another for years, it was obviously absurd to go on living as we were.

PETER. Yes. Anything else?

EVE. I told him he could institute proceedings for divorce as soon as he liked and I left him all my jewellery and—and—

PETER. Is that all?

EVE. Oh, no. I wrote him quite frankly, very fully—a long letter, so that there should be no misunderstanding. Gracious! I hope they won't read it all out in Court!

PETER. In Court?

EVE. Yes. During the case.

PETER. What case?

EVE. Our divorce!

PETER. Oh!

EVE. I wish I'd thought of that before. Those letters always sound so silly in the papers.

PETER. It's a pity you didn't. Did you say you mentioned my name—in full?

EVE. Well, it would have to come out anyway, wouldn't it?

PETER. Oh, Lord!

EVE. Never mind. Let's forget about it. Let's talk about something else. It's spoiling our evening. Our first beautiful, perfect evening.

PETER. But we've got to talk about it. You seem

to have arranged everything without considering me or my reputation in the very least.

EVE. Oh, what does a man's reputation matter?

PETER. A great deal. I have four very well-to-do relatives and expectations from three of them. If they read my name dragged into a divorce case they won't leave me a ha'penny.

EVE. Oh, what does money matter where there's love—

PETER. If there wasn't any money there wouldn't be much love—you can take that from me. [*Slight noise outside.*] Sh! What's that?

EVE. Perhaps it's John come after me! [*Clings to him.*]

PETER. If so, I don't think I ought to be present. After all, he's your husband, he's nothing to do with me. You'd much better see him alone. [*Listens.*] You stay here. I'll just look and see. Keep quite quiet. [*Exits. Eve watches him off. Then rushes to telephone.*]

EVE. Mayfair 19764. 764. Yes. Hullo! Is Mrs Werrington's maid there? I want to speak to her. Hullo! Hullo! Is that you, Marie? Has your master come in yet? What? What do you say? No? Ah. [*Uttering sigh of relief.*] Oh, Marie, you'll find a letter addressed to him in my handwriting on the hall table. Just fetch it away and put it in my desk, will you? I find I put the wrong enclosure in it. What? Yes. I'll be back quite soon. Yes, I shall be in to dinner after all. [*Hurriedly puts down receiver as Peter returns.*]

PETER. There's nobody there. It must have been

the postman. I went right down to the next landing to make sure.

EVE. Oh, you careful Peter! What does it matter? What does anything matter now?

PETER. That's all very well.

EVE. I don't care for anyone or anything now.

PETER. So it seems.

EVE. Be joyous, Peter. Be happy! Remember how long we've waited and now—now!

PETER. Well, I was prepared to wait. I expected to wait. But—

EVE. I wish I could understand. Have *I* altered or have you?

PETER. The position has altered.

EVE. But you said so often that the position was an intolerable one. Didn't you mean it?

PETER. Of course I did. I always say what I mean. But I never for one moment dreamt you would take such a step—that you would be so utterly unconventional. It makes you seem quite a different woman.

EVE. Don't you love me any longer?

PETER. Of course.

EVE. Then *what* is it?

PETER. I don't like being rushed—tricked into things.

EVE [*drawing herself up*]. What's that? What's that you said?

PETER. I said I didn't like being rushed.

EVE. Tricked you said. *Tricked!* It's not you who've been tricked, it's I—I! I who believed your words, your vows, your protestations of love and trusted in them. I who for your sake

have given up everything only to find you a man of straw—a coward!

PETER. Nothing of the sort!

EVE. You are, you are. You're just terrified for fear that my husband may come along any minute. You're trembling with fear—you who were so ready with brave words when there was no responsibility attached to them. You made me care for you; you persuaded—you tempted me, and then, when I come to you full of trust and confidence, you crumple up and fail me.

PETER. I don't wish to fail you.

EVE. What do you think there's left for a woman like me to do? I've given up home—husband—position for you—and you desert me.

PETER. Well, you've put me into a very awkward position.

EVE. *You, you!* And what of my position? I was prepared to give up so much for you—no sacrifice was too great, and now that it's too late I know the kind of man you really are, I know you're not worthy of it.

PETER. Not at all.

EVE [*pretending to break down*]. Oh, God, what a fool—what an utter fool I've been!

PETER. Well, you have certainly acted very harshly.

EVE [*appearing to be sobbing loudly*]. Oh, what am I to do, what am I to do?

PETER. It seems to me the wisest thing for you to do would be to go and stay with some woman friend, write your husband from her address and say that your note was written in a moment of hysteria—aberration—excitement or something

of the kind, and— [*Eve is convulsed with suppressed laughter and suddenly laughs outright.*] Really, Eve, really! Pull yourself together. You're—you're getting hysterical!

EVE. Oh, no, I'm not, Peter. But oh, how funny you are. And I never realized it until this minute. Oh, how you amuse me!

PETER [*with ruffled dignity*]. I'm sure I'm very glad to be so entertaining.

EVE. But you've quite cured me, Peter.

PETER. Cured you?

EVE. Yes. Of quite a number of vain, foolish illusions. I realize that there is after all much to be said for the old conventions. And now I must go.

PETER. Go? Go where?

EVE. Why, home, of course.

PETER. Home? But you said—

EVE [*mimicking him*]. But I said—oh, quite a lot of things, my dear Peter, just to find out the real value of many things you have said to me.

PETER. You've been getting at me?

EVE. Gorgeously—and most successfully.

PETER. You haven't left your husband after all?

EVE. Luckily, eh?

PETER. You didn't write—he hasn't had that letter from you?

EVE. Do you think I'd be going home if he had?

PETER. But what did you do it for?

EVE. Just to try you, Peter. But alas, I found you wanting.

PETER. Hang it all, it isn't playing the game.

EVE. What isn't playing the game?

PETER. Why, your putting it up on me like that,
just for fun.

EVE. But think how much worse it might have
been if it hadn't been just for fun! Good-bye,
Peter! And good-bye, *dear* little flat! [*Takes
up cloak and moves to door.*]

CURTAIN.

THE RETURN

PRODUCED AT THE ABBEY THEATRE, DUBLIN

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

PAUL LOWESKI. *An old Galician peasant.*

CATHERINE LOWESKI. *His wife.*

IVAN LOWESKI. *Their son.*

STEFAN. *The friend of his youth.*

THE RETURN

SCENE.—*Interior of the Loweskis' dwelling in Galicia.*

Stove back centre. Outer door left. Table down right. The room indicates great poverty.

At rise of curtain Ivan and Stefan heard off laughing and talking. They enter arm-in-arm. Stefan wears his work-a-day peasant's clothes. Ivan, bearded and travel-stained, wears ordinary modern suit under a long cloak, with his hat well over his eyes.

IVAN. So you wouldn't have recognized me, you old rascal you! [*Slapping him on shoulder.*] You didn't believe me when I told you I was really your old playmate Ivan! Ha! Ha! Well, I must have altered then. I should have known you anywhere, though you have grown a moustache as big as a Cossack's.

STEFAN. Well, you needn't talk, old lad, you've changed more than I have. How long ago is it since you went away? I know, it was after the rye famine. I was seventeen then, and so were you. That must be nearly ten years ago.

IVAN. Yes, ten years come next Kermesse.

STEFAN. And you were a poor, thin slip of a boy

with a pale, beardless face like a girl's, and now you're a great big fellow, ha! ha! No, I can't believe it's you.

IVAN. All right. [*Taking out pocket-book containing papers.*] Will you believe it now!—My passport—[*reading*] “This is to certify that Ivan Loweski . . .” [*handing it to Stefan*]. There you are, read it for yourself.

STEFAN [*looking at paper*]. Yes, that's right enough. [*Handing back paper.*] That's proof. No one would believe you without it, though.

IVAN. I know someone who will.

STEFAN. Who?

IVAN. The old mother. She'll know her son again. If her eyes play her false, her heart won't.

STEFAN. I'm not so sure.

IVAN. Well, I am then.

STEFAN. You forget how much you've altered.

IVAN. What's that to a mother? Why, I'll bet you fifty roubles that she knows me at once. Will you accept? Eh?

STEFAN. Fifty roubles! Holy Saints! Where could I get fifty roubles from? One rouble perhaps, and that I can't afford to lose, but fifty! Why, nobody in the village ever had fifty roubles, except perhaps the priest.

IVAN. All right, make it fifty roubles to one then, and if it were over any other bet I'd be glad to have you win it.

STEFAN. Come, come, one must not jest about money; it is very serious.

IVAN. Not to me, my boy. I've been where it grows; where it is more plentiful than in this

poor little village. I told you I wouldn't return without five thousand roubles, and I've got all that and more tucked in here [*patting chest pocket*], and you're all going to help me spend it, what's more!

STEFAN. Five thousand roubles! [*Whistles.*]

IVAN. Yes, and in good State Bank notes too. The old people will be pleased, eh? That will keep the wolf from the door for the rest of their lives, won't it? I shall get them out of this poverty-stricken little hole into a nice new house with a best room to it and a servant girl—what do you think of that? Now tell me, how are they?

STEFAN. They're not so young as they were, Ivan. Your mother, especially, she grows very old of late. She hasn't been the same woman since you went away. It was a great blow to her, though she was so brave. It has been ten long years of sorrow for her. Whenever she got a letter from you she would shut herself in for two days and none of the neighbours dare go near her, and when she went out of doors again it was as though she had wept some of her heart away.

IVAN. Poor little mother! Ah! but we'll soon mend all that and make her glad.

STEFAN. And then the last six months she had no news from you at all.

IVAN. No, I couldn't get a letter through. I reckoned to be home quite three months ago, but there came a chance of making another five hundred roubles, so I stayed on a couple of

months, and what with the heavy rains' and the bad roads, it's a wonder I got back at all.

STEFAN. She believes now that you never will. The last six months have been terrible for her; we hardly dare speak of you, such an awful look would come over her face, she seemed turned to stone.

IVAN. Poor old mother! But it's all over now and to-morrow, you see, she'll be as blithe as a bee.

STEFAN. But I wish you had come back sooner, you know you were all she had in the world. The child of her old age. To a mother her son is more precious than all the money in America.

IVAN. Oh, you old croaker, you wait till she feels my arms round her neck again! Yes, and sees what I've brought back for her.

STEFAN. You know, Ivan, I must warn you not to startle her or your father. Sudden joy can be dangerous for the old, especially after so much sorrow.

IVAN. All right, I won't.

STEFAN. If she fails to recognize you at first—

IVAN. Ha! Ha! I know you're thinking of your fifty roubles, you old miser you! I tell you, you've as good as lost it, you'll see. Just as though she won't know me the very instant she hears my voice!

STEFAN. Well, I hope you're right, but if she doesn't don't tell her too suddenly, will you?

IVAN. No, of course not, as though I should.

STEFAN. Oh, I'm not so sure, you're such a madcap. Tell me now, what will you do if she doesn't know you?

IVAN. What I shall do—I'll—I'll—well, what *shall* I do?

STEFAN [*laughs*]. Why, break it to her very, very gently. Now, I'll tell you—pretend you are a friend of her son Ivan's come from America and bringing news of him. First, get her accustomed to the idea that he is alive and well.

IVAN. Right you are. That's good. Why, I'm almost beginning to hope she won't know me; it will be such fun telling them tales about myself and hearing the dear old things talk about me—But, of course, my mother will know me at once, bless you.

STEFAN. Sh! There's one of them.

IVAN. Now, don't give me away, let's see if they know me. [*Door opens. Loweski enters heavily, closes door and peers into the room.*]

LOWESKI. Who's there? Who is it?

STEFAN. It's me, little father—me, Stefan.

LOWESKI. Oh, it's you, is it; but who is with you?

STEFAN. A gentleman to see you.

LOWESKI. Good-day to you, sir.

IVAN. Good-day to *you*, sir.

LOWESKI. I cannot see you well. My eyes are a little dim. Do you belong to our village?

IVAN. I once lived here, but it was some years ago.

LOWESKI. Ah! I have lived here for over three-score years, so I should know you.

IVAN. And don't you?

LOWESKI [*putting on spectacles*]. No, I cannot recall your face.

IVAN [*disappointed*]. Oh! [*sees Stefan laughing*] well perhaps you didn't see me often enough.

LOWESKI [*humbly*]. Ah, that may be, stranger, that may be it. I don't get very far away. From my door to the mine in the early morning and then home again at night—one is too tired to wander far afield.

STEFAN. This gentleman has some important news for you—news about somebody.

LOWESKI. News—for me?

STEFAN. Yes, he has just come from America.

LOWESKI. Then it's about our son! Oh, tell me, tell me quickly before my wife comes in—and if it's something she'd better not know—

STEFAN. Better not know?

LOWESKI. You see she dreamed three nights he was dead, and to-day she met three crows on her way to the bake-house, and she has been very bad—very bad!

STEFAN. Why, little father, it's good news!

LOWESKI. Good news of our boy?

IVAN. Yes, good news, quite good news. He is as well and as happy as can be.

LOWESKI [*dropping into chair*]. My son is well?

IVAN. Rather. I should think he is. He's as healthy and as strong as a horse.

LOWESKI. Then why hasn't he written for so long?

IVAN. Well, I'm afraid that's my fault. You see he thought I should be seeing you sooner to give you all his loving messages. That's why you haven't heard before. That's why.

LOWESKI. Oh, what will the mother say, Stefan? What *will* she say, eh?

STEFAN. That will make her happy, won't it?

LOWESKI. Happy? You're right there. [*To*

Ivan]. Oh, stranger, please won't you stay till she comes in, to tell her all about him yourself. She cannot be very long now. She was only going into neighbour Gutschow's to borrow a little coffee. [*Ivan whispers to Stefan.*]

STEFAN. Our friend wants a bed for the night. He doesn't care to stay at the inn. I wondered if you could let him have Ivan's just for one night? He would pay you well.

LOWESKI. Ivan's bed? No one has slept in it since he went away. My wife would not have it. But perhaps for this gentleman who brings us good tidings—eh?

STEFAN. Oh, I think she'd consent.

LOWESKI [*to Ivan*]. I think it will be all right, stranger, but when the mother comes in we will ask her.

IVAN. That's right. I think somehow she'll let me stay [*winking at Stefan*].

LOWESKI [*fidgeting with impatience*]. I can't think why she isn't back yet. I'll just see if she is coming down the road. [*Totters to doorway, where he is seen looking down road.*]

STEFAN [*in a whisper to Ivan*]. Well, what did I tell you?

IVAN. Oh, the old man was always a bit of a dreamer, but you wait till mother comes in; she won't take long finding me out.

STEFAN. I almost hope she won't for your sake. But be prepared; these ten years have made a lot of difference to her. Sh! [*Grips Ivan.*]
Sh! There she is.

[*Loweski returns with his wife, explaining the*

situation. She is bent and withered, and her mouth is tightly closed with the repression of ten years' misery.]

LOWESKI. Well, my dear, I was telling the gentleman that no one has ever slept in the bed since our Ivan went away, but Stefan thought—

MOTHER [*harshly*]. What's it matter what Stefan thought? I don't keep a lodging-house for strange men. You'd better tell him so and send him about his business.

[Ivan looks at her, stunned, trying to recognize in her his mother.]

LOWESKI. Hush, mother, this is the gentleman.

MOTHER [*peering at Ivan*]. Ah, well, sir, I suppose you thought this place was old and dirty enough to be a common lodging-house, but it isn't, so there. I harbour no vagrants.

IVAN [*pained*]. Oh!

LOWESKI. Pardon, sir, my wife does not understand, she does not know—but if you will tell her what you have just told me—

MOTHER. Oh, you—you listen to everybody's tales—you let them all twist you round their fingers.

LOWESKI [*eagerly*]. Tell her, tell her.

MOTHER. It won't make any difference; it won't alter my mind. [*Loveski nods encouragingly to Ivan.*]

IVAN [*to mother hesitatingly*]. I've just been telling him—I've just been telling him—

MOTHER. A pack of lies I make no doubt.

[Ivan looks appealingly at Stefan.]

STEFAN. Come, come now, he's all right. I'll guarantee that.

MOTHER. Shut up, hold your tongue, let him speak for himself. [*To Ivan.*] Now you there.

IVAN. What I wanted to tell you was that I have seen your son.

MOTHER [*clutching Ivan and speaking eagerly*]. My son! my boy!! Where—when did you see him? Tell me quick! How was he looking? Was he well? Did he speak of his mother? Is he ever coming home?

LOWESKI. There you go—there you go. How's the gentleman to answer so many questions at once. You better tell him he may stay here, and then you will have the whole evening for news of Ivan.

MOTHER [*to Loweski*]. Of course he can stay. [*To Ivan.*] Oh, sir, tell me, tell me, was he really well? I dreamt last night that I saw him lying dead in his coffin. Oh, tell me he is well!

IVAN. I should just think he is. Such a big, sturdy fellow. Why, you won't recognize him for your son.

MOTHER. Ha, I see you're as big a fool as the rest of them! Only a man could say a stupid thing like that, as though anything could make me not know my boy again. If I were blind and could not see him, deaf and could not hear his voice, yet I should know him. A mother carries her children in her heart long after they have left her womb. So he's grown a big, sturdy fellow, has he? He wasn't so strong when he went away, but he worked in the quick-silver mines since he was so high, and that eats into you like poison, and keeps you small

and sickly, small and sickly. [*Sits muttering to herself.*]

STEFAN. Well, I must be going now. [*To Ivan.*]
I'll look in in the morning and see how you've fared. [*Aside.*] And collect my roubles, eh?

IVAN. Ah, yes. You've won them right enough.

STEFAN. Honestly, I wish I hadn't, but it was only to be expected. You should have come back sooner.

IVAN [*remorsefully.*] I wish to God I had [*pulling himself together*], but never mind, you wait until to-morrow, it will be all right then, and we'll have some fun, I promise you, and make up for what we've missed to-night.

STEFAN. But be careful, be careful how you break it to them.

IVAN. You trust me; I shan't attempt to-night. I shall just make them feel happy and hopeful about me, then they will be more prepared. Good-night, Stefan.

STEFAN. Good-night—good-night all.

ALL. Good-night. [*Stefan exits.*]

MOTHER. Thank goodness he's gone, Now I want to know all about my boy—everything. [*She sits down, gripping her elbows, staring at Ivan.*]
When did you see him last? When did you first meet him?

IVAN. When did we first meet? Well, it's so long ago now that I can hardly remember.

LOWESKI. When he first went out there?

IVAN. Yes, that's it; we were—we were kind of neighbours, you know.

MOTHER. It's strange he never wrote of you in his letters.

LOWESKI. Were you—what they call—prospecting too?

IVAN. Yes. I was very lucky, I—

MOTHER [*impatiently*]. You haven't told me if he was happy—contented.

IVAN. Oh, as contented as he could be so far from home.

LOWESKI. Yes, he was always a home bird, it was wonderful he could tear himself away.

MOTHER. My son was no cowardly stay-at-home. Pooh! he wasn't content to be a serf like the rest of you. The boy was ambitious; he knew he was wasted here. [*Sudden change of tone.*] But tell me, didn't he want to come back—to come home to his mother, sometimes?

IVAN. It was his one thought by day and by night, I know it was. There was a little picture he had of you—

LOWESKI. Yes, mother, you know. The one the man made of you who came round at Kermesse.

IVAN. And every night he would look at that picture and kiss it and say, "Another day, little mother, another day nearer home," and he carried it in this pocket [*patting left breast pocket*] all day long.

MOTHER [*loudly*]. Then why—why hasn't he come home to us sooner? Doesn't he know that if he tarries much longer these old eyes may not be able to see him, these old arms may not be there to clasp him at all?

IVAN. Oh, don't say that, don't say that! You take my word, he'll be coming quite soon, much sooner than you think, and then how happy

you'll be! He'll make you comfortable for the rest of your lives and buy you all sorts of good things.

MOTHER. Soon two coffins will be all he'll need to buy us.

LOWESKI. I suppose he is making plenty of money out there?

MOTHER. Hasn't Ivan written you that often enough; don't you believe your own son?

LOWESKI. Yes, mother, of course, but you know our Ivan is so proud, he'd be sure to want you to think he was getting rich. But one hears such tales, such tales . . . [*To Ivan.*] Is it true, stranger, that out there there's gold, real gold, in the earth and gold in the rivers too?

IVAN. True? Ha, I should think it is. Wait a moment, I'll show you something [*showing small nugget*]. There, what do you think of that? [*Both attempt to grasp nugget simultaneously.*]

IVAN. Yes, it's gold all right. You look at it. Well, I've made enough out of little knobs like that to live like a gentleman for the rest of my life.

LOWESKI. Well, well.

IVAN. Do you know what I've got here in this pocket? [*Loweski shakes his head whilst the mother still gazes at Ivan.*] Five thousand roubles, five thousand roubles, and all earned with this pair of hands. There!

MOTHER [*almost to herself*]. Five thousand roubles! That's just what Ivan said he would bring back;

he said he wouldn't come back without it. [*To Loweski.*] Don't you remember?

LOWESKI. So he did, so he did to be sure, just before he kissed me good-bye. Ah, he meant too, he meant it.

MOTHER. Of course he meant it, I know my boy. Five thousand roubles!

LOWESKI. But it must be hard to make so much money as all that. Why, I have never had fifty roubles all at once, and I am nearly forty years older than he is. [*To Ivan.*] It's wonderful, sir, to have so much money! How happy your people—all who are near and dear to you—will be to see you home.

IVAN. Why, as for that, there is no one nearer or dearer to me than, for example, your two selves.

LOWESKI. What a pity! No one to look for your return? But with all your roubles you will soon find a wife, and then there'll be glad faces to welcome you, eh?

IVAN [*laughing*]. Ah, there's plenty of time for that; I've got other matters to see to first. Besides, I'm going to enjoy myself for a bit, to have my fling and—

MOTHER. Fools have their fling while better men toil and suffer. Ah, I know your sort!

IVAN. Why, I want everyone to be happy and enjoy life. That's what we're here for.

LOWESKI. Oh, you young men, you young men! Why should we expect to be happy? Lords and ladies are happy—not poor slaves like us.

IVAN. Oh, don't say that! Come now, sit down

and tell me all about yourselves; how you live, everything.

MOTHER [*sneeringly*]. Ha, he talks like the new policeman.

LOWESKI. Be quiet, mother, how can you? Tch! Tch! [*To Ivan.*] You want to know how we live, sir? Well, that's what I often wonder myself. I get a little job at the mines sometimes, but it's very hard work, and they only give you a few copecks when it's all done. My wife earns a bit of bread now and then for washing down the outhouses at the bakery—their young men won't do that dirty work. Sometimes we pick up a bit of food in the waste heaps, though it's mostly rotten; but you can't be dainty with an empty stomach.

IVAN. That won't do! We must put that right. I say, I'm so hungry! I want my supper badly. Now I come to think of it, I haven't had a bite since the morning.

LOWESKI. Well, sir, will you condescend to share our poor supper? Times are hard with us. The masters grind us down more and more every year, especially when one grows old. We have not much to offer you—corn, tea and rye bread.

IVAN. That's just what I like, it will suit me just right, and afterwards we'll have a bottle of the best vodka to finish up the evening, eh? What do you say to that?

LOWESKI. Ah, it is a long time since I tasted vodka, a very long time—it was at Master Phillipovitch's marriage.

MOTHER. Yes, and you came home drunk and couldn't go to work the next day, and there was no money to buy bread with [*bitterly*] I remember.

LOWESKI. Hush, mother, hush! What a tale!

IVAN. Oh, well, we'll be careful to-night, and only take as much as is good for us. Now, I'll go over to the inn while you get the tea ready. I won't be long—would you like me to bring anything in—a little pig meat or something?

LOWESKI [*rubbing his hands*]. You're very kind, stranger.

MOTHER. Dry bread isn't good enough for the gentleman—he's not used to it like we are. You needn't get anything different for us.

LOWESKI [*perturbed*]. Oh, mother!

IVAN [*ignoring her remark*]. Well, I'll get off now.
[*Exits.*]

MOTHER. Five thousand roubles. Five thousand roubles.

LOWESKI. Yes, isn't it a lot? [*Busy with samovar.*]
Fancy if our son had that!

MOTHER. If my boy had five thousand roubles he'd come home.

LOWESKI. Ah, well, everyone can't be so rich; it's all a matter of luck, you know, all a matter of luck.

MOTHER. Five thousand roubles.

LOWESKI. The water's boiling now but it isn't good tea. I don't think the gentleman will like it much, and the bread's mouldy. I tasted it this morning. I wonder whether I could—

MOTHER [*shouts*]. Shut up, you! What do I care if we're all mouldy, all mouldy—

LOWESKI. Dear me, dear me!

MOTHER [*muttering*]. Five thousand roubles.

LOWESKI. I expect he will pay us well for sleeping here. To-morrow we can buy a new loaf and some tea, and I daresay he'll leave the rest of the vodka behind him. When one has five thousand roubles.

MOTHER. Curse him, damn him, blast him to hell.

LOWESKI. Why, I think he's a very pleasant gentleman, and he's going to buy the best vodka.

MOTHER. I hate him; I hate him with his good clothes and fine talk, while all the time he mocks at our poverty. It's the rich men like him that keep us poor. What does he want with five thousand roubles? No one cares whether he's alive or dead. He's got no one to look for him, no one to mourn him, no one to await his return.

LOWESKI. No, it's not like our boy.

MOTHER. If our boy had five thousand roubles he'd come home to us, come home before we're both dead and eaten by the worms.

LOWESKI. Yes, I sometimes wonder if I ever shall see him again. I'm getting old, very old.

MOTHER. Then why don't you think what could be done to see him again?

LOWESKI. What can one do, my dear? He's very headstrong like you; he won't come home till he's got the money.

MOTHER. Why don't we send him the money?

LOWESKI. Send him the money? Ha, ha! that's a good jest, that is. Where should we get it from?

MOTHER. From him.

LOWESKI. Him? Him? The stranger?

MOTHER. Yes.

LOWESKI. How is it possible? He would go to the magistrate in the morning and tell about us, and we would be put in prison, and then we would soon die.

MOTHER. He might not be able to tell about us.

LOWESKI. Oh, hush, hush, mother, what are you saying?

MOTHER. It would be quite easy. He'll drink a lot of vodka, and then when he is half drunk and asleep—think, we should have our boy again.

LOWESKI. Oh, mother, it's a very terrible thing to do. You must have grown very wicked to think of it.

MOTHER. I want my boy, I shall die if I don't see him soon.

LOWESKI [*wrings his hands in despair*]. Oh, dear, oh, dear!

MOTHER. After supper he'll get drowsy with the drink, then you must get the axe from the shed, and—and then our boy can come home again!

LOWESKI. Oh, it would be a dreadful thing to do! I can't, no, I can't do it! [*Pause.*] The thought of it makes me feel cold all over—cold all over.

IVAN [*entering*]. Cold, are you? [*Holding up bottle.*] Well, this will warm you, eh? Now, where are the glasses? I'll get them. [*Goes to a curtained shelf, side of stove.*]

LOWESKI. Ah, sir, you forget we are poor, we have no glasses now. Once we had three—didn't we,

mother? They stood just on that very shelf; it is strange that you should look there for them.

IVAN [*whistles to himself at his blunder*]. Well, I thought it seemed the kind of place where glasses ought to be kept. Ha, ha!

LOWESKI. Oh, yes, oh, yes, they ought to. [*Eager for vodka.*] Here are two mugs and a basin. That will serve for the vodka, eh? [*Ivan draws cork. Loweski sniffs eagerly.*] Ah, that's good, that smells very good, that's the real stuff that is. [*Sniffs again.*] Some of the best, some of the very best, that will warm us up, won't it?

[*Ivan has poured out the drink; the old man can hardly keep from clutching the biggest bowl.*]

IVAN [*offering mug to mother*]. Now I hope you'll like this. It wouldn't taste nicer if you drank it out of a golden goblet.

[*Mother pushes it from her so that it falls and breaks. Loweski screams and proceeds to lap up liquor from floor.*]

MOTHER. You keep your vodka and golden goblets to yourself! Coming here to jeer at our poverty, at our cracked old mugs! We haven't been making money in foreign parts, we haven't. We've no riches to brag about, we're only poor hungry wretches, we are. You've come to the wrong place for merry-making, I tell you. You'd better take yourself and your liquor off to drunken Olga's, she's more in your line—

LOWESKI. Not so hasty, mother, not so hasty. The gentleman was only making his little joke. I know! [*To Ivan.*] Pray don't be vexed with her, sir.

IVAN. No, it was all my fault; it was my mistake.
I hadn't realized— [*The mother turns away from them and sits brooding.*]

LOWESKI [*confidentially*]. She gets taken like that, sir, sometimes. Quite wild. She doesn't mean it, of course, she doesn't know what she's saying. She's been like it ever since our boy went away. How I wish he would come home!

IVAN. Oh, I can't keep it secret any longer. Listen, I've got something to tell you both—it's—

LOWESKI. Wait till she's in a better temper. It's a pity she spilt the vodka, but I saved as much as I could, ha, ha! It's such very good stuff.

IVAN [*laughing*]. Oh, don't bother about that! Why, here's yours, which will you have?

LOWESKI [*eagerly comparing contents of bowl and mug*]. You must have the mug, sir, of course. I'm more used to the bowl.

IVAN. Well, here goes then. Here's long life to both of you.

LOWESKI [*drinking*].- Thank you, sir [*drinking*], and long life to you, sir—long life and—[*Mother turns and gazes at him ; he chokes and puts down bowl*]. Oh, dear, oh, dear!

IVAN. A bit fiery, isn't it? Well, we've got all the night before us, and there's plenty more where this comes from. [*Taking up bottle.*] Come now, ready for some more?

LOWESKI. If you please, sir. It is good. We shan't feel the cold to-night with that in our bellies. Here, mother [*proffering her his bowl*], you take a sip, it will do you good. Go on now, do.

IVAN. Yes, come now, you must drink my health.
I insist; you must drink to my return.

MOTHER [*suddenly*]. All right, I will; give it to me. Yes, I'll drink to your return. I'll drink to it.

LOWESKI. That's right now. Let's drink to his return.

[*All drink. Loweski begins to grow excited.*]

LOWESKI. Ah, you're a lucky man, you are!

IVAN [*a little depressed*]. I suppose so.

LOWESKI. Suppose so! H'm, there's many that would be glad to be in your shoes! If I had your fortune I'd be happy enough.

MOTHER [*whiningly*]. But then you're only a poor, ignorant peasant, my man. You're happy if you've enough food to eat; you don't know the needs of a rich gentleman with nice feelings and lots of roubles. It takes much more to make his sort happy than us.

LOWESKI. Rubbish! What more does a man want than food and drink? I don't see why one man should have nothing and another everything; it's the rich what keeps us poor, that's what I say.

IVAN. But I've had to work too.

MOTHER [*to Loweski*]. Yes, don't forget he's had to work, though he does look so well and flourishing. He's not a poor old greybeard like you, with one foot in the grave. He's going to have a good time and enjoy life. He's done all the work he's going to do, though he may be young enough to be your son.

LOWESKI [*maudlin*]. It isn't fair; it isn't fair.

IVAN. I don't think that's quite reasonable of you.

MOTHER (*to Loweski*). Now you've annoyed the gentleman.

LOWESKI. Annoyed him [*snaps fingers*], ha, that's all I care for him, I say what I think. I'm not afraid of anyone. I don't care if they put me in prison for it either. I say what I think, I do, I do.

MOTHER. Don't take any notice of him, stranger, it's the vodka, it makes him quarrelsome.

IVAN. Oh, I understand, that's all right.

MOTHER. It excites him. But you—you finish the bottle; it will do you more good than it will him.

IVAN. Oh, very well then, just another for a night-cap, and then I'll be going to bed. B-r-r-r! It's cold to-night. [*Gets up and goes to stove.*]

MOTHER [*handing him mug*]. Here's your vodka, stranger.

IVAN [*drowsily*]. Thanks. [*Yawning.*] Oh, dear, I am tired. I'll be off to bed soon, and in the morning everything will be different.

MOTHER [*down stage*]. Yes. Everything will be different in the morning.

IVAN [*sleepily*]. You know you'll soon have your son home again.

MOTHER. Yes, my son will soon be home again.

IVAN [*brightening*]. Ah, you feel that?

MOTHER. I know it.

IVAN. Splendid! You didn't feel so sure about it when I first came, did you? I've cheered you up, haven't I? I mean I've made you more hopeful.

MOTHER. Now I am filled with hope.

IVAN. That's right, and in the morning—[*repeated*]

yawns]—in the morning—[yawns]. Oh, I am so sleepy. I must get to bed.

[Rises and stretches himself.]

MOTHER. The bed is ready. [Indicating inner room.] In there. May you sleep soundly.

IVAN. Oh, I shall sleep well enough—the moment I get into bed. I'm half asleep now. Good-night. [Sees Loweski dozing with his head on table.] I won't disturb him. Good-night again.

MOTHER. Good-night.

[Ivan goes into inner room. Mother stands listening for a moment, then grips Loweski by the shoulder.]

MOTHER. Nicolas! Nicolas!

LOWESKI [drowsily]. Yes? What is it?

MOTHER. He's gone to bed.

LOWESKI. I don't care. I don't like the man. He annoyed me. I'm not afraid of anyone.

MOTHER. You'll find the axe in the shed!

LOWESKI. The axe? What axe?

MOTHER. Go!

LOWESKI. But, my dear—

MOTHER. Go! Must an old woman show you courage?

LOWESKI. It isn't that, but—

MOTHER. Is that man more to you than your own boy and me?

[Loweski shakes his head.]

MOTHER. Then go!

[Loweski pulls himself together, walks unsteadily to door and exits. The mother calmly tidies room, stopping now and then to listen at

Ivan's door. After a few moments outer door is slowly opened and Loweski cautiously enters with axe.]

LOWESKI [*whispers*]. Do you think he's asleep?

MOTHER. Yes, all is quiet.

LOWESKI. I don't like the job.

MOTHER. You coward! Think what it means!

LOWESKI. No, I can't!

MOTHER. Five thousand roubles—

LOWESKI [*moving to door*]. Five thousand roubles.

MOTHER. Good food to eat—and vodka!

LOWESKI. Ah! [*Moves nearer.*]

MOTHER. And our boy home again!

[Loweski creeps stealthily to door.]

MOTHER [*hoarsely*]. Bring the money to me!

[Loweski opens door and softly goes into inner room. Mother stands listening. Presently Loweski returns white and trembling with pocket-book and passport.]

MOTHER. Is he quite dead?

[Loweski nods.]

MOTHER. The money—quick!

[Loweski mechanically hands her the pocket-book.]

MOTHER [*pulling out banknotes and counting them.*]

One hundred, two hundred, three hundred, four—

LOWESKI [*unfolds passport which he is holding, glances at it, falls on chair. Gasps.*] Ivan!

MOTHER. Yes! Three thousand—four thousand—five thousand! Yes, yes! We shall see our Ivan now!

CURTAIN.

AFTER THE CASE

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

MRS MARY HAMILTON. *Recently divorced.*

MRS NORA BLAND. *Her friend.*

MAURICE GRANT. *Co-respondent.*

MRS COLLINS. *Landlady.*

SCENE.—*Mrs Hamilton's rooms off Portman Square.*

TIME.—*The present.*

AFTER THE CASE

Mrs Hamilton's rooms. Typical superior lodgings—no attempt has been made by present occupant to individualize them. Mrs Collins discovered prying into drawers, books, etc. She finds a locked writing-case, and after preliminary business picks lock and opens it with a hairpin. Takes out various photographs and letters, and spreads them before her on table.

MRS COLLINS [*taking up photograph*]. Ah! that's 'im right enough. Didn't seem to fancy hisself in the box so much yesterday though. [*To another.*] And that'll be 'er little gel! Lor'! what a little duck to be sure! [*To another.*] Let me see, that'll be 'er 'usband, of course! 'Andsome-looking, too, poor fellow! Well, it beats me 'ow a woman can be've like a dirty slut when she's got a good 'usband, a nice 'ome and a little gel like that.

NEWSBOY [*heard off, calling*]. 'Amilton Dee-vorce! Verdict! All the Winners! Shockin' Suicide! 'Amilton Dee-vorce! Verdict! All the Winners! 'Amilton Dee-vorce! Verdict! Suicide at Swiss Cottage.

MRS COLLINS [*listens, then hurries to window*]. Hi!

boy! Hi! you! Let's 'ave a paper. 'Ave you got a 'apenny? What's the verdict of the divorce?

Boy [off]. Eight 'undred quid and costs. 'Ere y'are.

MRS COLLINS. Eight 'undred 'e's got ter pay? Lor' lumme! Why didn't they fine 'er somethink too? The dirty 'ussy! Come on now, let's 'ave it. Eh? What say? Ah! You're right; not 'arf!

Boy [off]. Paper, sir? Six-thirty! 'Amilton Dee-vice! Verdict! All the Winners! Shockin' Suicide! All the Winners! 'Amilton Dee-vice.

[Voice dies away. Mrs Collins walks slowly back to table, opening the paper. She sits down squarely and spreads the sheet out before her. Eagerly hunts up and down columns.]

MRS COLLINS [reading]. "Bernard Shaw speaks out"—no, that ain't it—"The Bishop Replies"—oh, lor' "Football Gossip"—hm—m—ah! 'ere we are. My word! a 'ole column nearly. Now where's me glasses? *[Business cleaning and putting on spectacles. Reads.]* "Defendant, who looked very pale, wore a black velvet 'at with a large white osprey and a long sable coat"—yes, that's right—"was assisted back into court by her counsel"—*[reads to herself, then continues aloud.]* "The jury, after twenty minutes' deliberation, found the defendant had been guilty of misconduct."—H'm—m—"The defendant swayed and would 'ave fallen 'ad 'er counsel not supported 'er. The president, in

summing up, said that never had he come across a more—a more—flagrant case. 'Ere was a woman surrounded by every luxury, loved and respected by 'er husband and all who knew 'er—with maternal duties to fill her life, suddenly giving way to a sordid temptation, to a vulgar intrigue. The fact that only one single lapse had been proved in no way mitigated her infidelity in the eyes of the law." Lor'! Don't 'e give 'er a tearing! "In view of all the circumstances, he ordered the co-respondent to pay £800 damages and costs and the plaintiff to have custody of the child subject to an application for access." There now! Well, I never did—

[Door suddenly opens and Mrs Hamilton enters. She stands in doorway taking in situation. Mrs Collins looks up, is momentarily taken aback, but soon recovers.]

MRS HAMILTON *[quickly]*. What are you doing here, Mrs Collins, in my room?

MRS COLLINS. Oh, I knew you wouldn't mind my coming up here. You see the girl's turning out my sitting-room and there ain't another fire, see? I didn't think you'd be back yet. So—er—I thought I might— Oh, all right, I'll clear out now.

MRS HAMILTON. Your domestic arrangements are no concern of mine, Mrs Collins, but either my rooms are private or— *[catching sight of rifled case]*. Why, what's this? What does this mean?

MRS COLLINS. Oh, I was just dustin' and tidyin' up

a bit, and that fell out of my hands and opened itself like. [*Pause. Then taking up photo.*] Nice, pretty little gel, that of yours.

MRS HAMILTON [*advancing to table*]. Please put that down. [*Suddenly seeing paper.*] Oh!

MRS COLLINS. Yes, I was just reading about your case when you come in. They've put a lot in about you.

MRS HAMILTON. Will you please go out of my room?

MRS COLLINS. Why, certainly, Mrs—er—Mrs—Hamilton—certainly— [*Pause. Busy tidying up.*] Shall you be in for dinner?

MRS HAMILTON [*with nerves on edge*]. I don't know. If I want anything I'll tell you. You can leave all those things.

MRS COLLINS. Oh, I'd better put things a bit straight for you. [*Suggestively.*] You might be 'aving a visitor, p'r'aps.

[*Mrs Hamilton does not reply, but opens and glances at two letters lying on mantelpiece. After a pause Mrs Collins goes slowly to door, opens it as if to exit, then stops to deliver her parting shot.*] [*Loudly.*] By the bye, Mrs—er—'Amilton, I'm afraid you'll 'ave to be leaving my rooms at the end of the week. I've got another let, see?

MRS HAMILTON. But you said the rooms would be free for as long as I wanted them.

MRS COLLINS. Oh, yes, well that was when you first come. But I've got another let now, see? Of course, if the party should change their mind I'd let you know. It all depends, see?

MRS HAMILTON. Very well. Thank you, that will do.

MRS COLLINS. I thought I'd just tell you. I'm sure you'll 'ave no trouble to find something else more convenient, some other rooms as might suit you better. A pleasant lady like you!
[Exit, slamming door.]

[Left alone Mrs Hamilton mechanically collects scattered letters. Some she tears up and replaces others in case. After looking intently at the photos she gently puts them on the fire, one by one, watching them burn. The last portrait seems to rouse her, and she kisses it passionately, then murmurs, "My baby, my own little baby girl." A long quivering sob goes through her, then she burns it with the others and sits down gazing into the fire.]

Door opens and Mrs Bland peeps in. She is a bustling, practical woman, beaming with inward satisfaction at her own kindheartedness.]

MRS BLAND. Mary! [Goes to Mrs Hamilton with outstretched hands:]

MRS HAMILTON [suggestion of choked tears in her voice]. Nora! Oh, it's good of you, dear. I didn't think—I never imagined you'd come.

MRS BLAND [briskly]. Don't be so absurd! Why, of course I should come. Nice sort of a friend I should be if I didn't. Why, my goodness, you're looking absolutely worn out. Let me take your hat off. [Removing Mary's hat.] There now, that's better, isn't it? How long have you been in?

MRS HAMILTON. Only a few minutes. It was past five when I left the Court—

MRS BLAND [anxious to avoid the unpleasant topic.]
Now, dear, tell me, have you had any tea? I

don't believe you have. I'll ring for some, shall I?

MRS HAMILTON. No, thanks. I've had some. They got me some whilst we were waiting—waiting for the jury.

MRS BLAND [*interrupting.*] Oh, you're just tired out, I can see. You must be, poor thing. Now don't you think you'd better just let me tuck you up on the couch and then you can have a good rest, and perhaps get a little sleep. That will make you feel ever so much better. At present you're just a bundle of nerves, a thinking, worrying bundle of nerves! Now, aren't you? You take my advice and have a nice lie down. You must take care of yourself, you know.

MRS HAMILTON. Why?

MRS BLAND. Why? Why? Oh, because—because it's your duty to take care of yourself, it's everybody's duty.

MRS HAMILTON [*smiling faintly*]. Now, Nora dear, do be decent. It's indecent to talk platitudes to the dead.

MRS BLAND [*very shocked*]. Mary! How can you?

MRS HAMILTON. Don't pretend to be shocked. You know perfectly well that to all intents and purposes I am dead. I'm as much beyond the pale of Society as if I didn't exist.

MRS BLAND. I don't like the way you're talking, Mary. It isn't right, it isn't fair. You've lots of friends.

MRS HAMILTON. Oh, no, my dear, I haven't. You know it. I have one—yourself.

MRS BLAND. Why, I know quite a number. Why, do you know, I met the Faulkners as I was coming along and they sent all kinds of nice messages to you. They're only just home from India.

MRS HAMILTON. Had they heard? Did they know about me?

MRS BLAND. I'm sure I don't know. I'm afraid I didn't mention it. The subject didn't happen to come up. [*Mrs Hamilton laughs.*] What are you laughing at?

MRS HAMILTON. At you, you dear old thing. Do you believe for one moment that you'll meet a single acquaintance of mine during the next few days who won't discuss my divorce even before the weather?

MRS BLAND. Oh, Mary! why should you think everyone so morbid?

MRS HAMILTON. You know perfectly well that they'd all of them give worlds for any unpleasant details that had escaped the papers. Why, if you were to give them a full account of how you found me looking, and what I said after the case, you'd be the most popular woman in Kensington. You know you would.

MRS BLAND. Oh, my dear, don't! It isn't like you. Don't! [*Stroking Mary's hand.*]

MRS HAMILTON. All right, I won't. But if you'd seen those women this afternoon—women whom I've treated as pals—with whom I've spent weeks together, crowding into the court to quiz me, staring at me as though I were some strange new animal, putting up their glasses to have a

better look, to see what I'd got on—whispering, giggling, chattering whilst another woman's soul was being vivisected, laid bare by men who enjoyed doing it as much as a surgeon cutting up a dog! [*Deep breath.*] Don't think I'm trying to mitigate what I've done. But surely I was a woman just like themselves. They might have had some shred of feeling! They might at least have stayed away. If you had only seen them!

MRS BLAND [*indignantly*]. I wouldn't have been there for anything.

MRS HAMILTON. Of course you wouldn't. You're too loyal, too kind. [*Reflectively.*] I hate to think I'm not going to see you any more.

MRS BLAND. What do you mean? Of course you are going to see me.

MRS HAMILTON. No, Nora, I'm not. Don't think I'm not appreciative, don't think I haven't realized all that it's meant for you to come here this afternoon—to come against your own true inclination and judgment for the sake of a friendship that's over.

MRS BLAND. It isn't over. Of course it isn't over!

MRS HAMILTON. Oh, yes, it is. In your heart you know as well as I do that you're merely clinging to the empty shell of a dead friendship. If we hadn't been friends for so many years you wouldn't now be trying hard to say things that don't hurt to a divorced woman. It must be very difficult. There are so many tender spots—so many thin bits of ice to avoid. My dear, our friendship was built up of things we had in

common, and they're all gone now. Don't you understand? Why didn't you send me a polite note like the kindest of them will do? Like this, for instance—listen! [*Takes letter from mantelpiece, reads.*] “So sorry I can't get along to see you, but Dolly has the 'flu and I daren't leave the child.” Here's another of them—“We are in the midst of a chaos of boxes and packing. Just off to Switzerland, or should have tried to catch a glimpse of you. Be sure and let me know all your plans—just what you are going to do.” Yes, why didn't you write, Nora? It would have been so much more comfortable for you.

MRS BLAND. Oh, Mary, don't be horrid, don't—

MRS HAMILTON. Don't tell the truth, you mean. Why not? It's got to be faced, there will be nothing but hard, cold truths for me now. Good-bye, my friend, it was kind and brave of you to come, but it's no use, no use.

MRS BLAND. Well, dear, let me—let me come another day, when you're feeling better. I was hoping I might be some comfort to you this afternoon, but if I can't do anything I'm afraid I'd better go. I'll write to you anyway.

MRS HAMILTON. Yes, dear, you'll write to me, that will be best. You'll write. [*Smiles slightly.*] Good-bye, Nora. [*Holds out her hands.*]

MRS BLAND. Good-bye, Mary dear. Now do take care of yourself, won't you? Don't do anything hasty—anything rash! Promise!

MRS HAMILTON. No, dear. [*Kissing her.*] Good-bye.

[*Mrs Bland exits. Mary stands watching her off. Pause. Then she draws a deep breath as though she were near the limits of her endurance. Suddenly hears door banging and voices off. She becomes rigid and stands waiting. Knock at door.*]

MRS HAMILTON. What is it?

MRS COLLINS [*off*]. Gentleman to see you, madam.

MRS HAMILTON. Will you ask him in, please?

[*Short pause and Maurice Grant enters. He is a suave, well-dressed man of forty.*]

GRANT. Whew! Those stairs! I thought I should never get to the end of them! Well, my dear? Got back all right then—

MRS HAMILTON. Yes.

GRANT. Just met your friend, Mrs Bland. Cut me dead, absolutely dead! Ha! [*Pause.*] She been to see you?

MRS HAMILTON. Yes.

GRANT. Been treating you to a measure of her opinion of me, I suppose.

MRS HAMILTON. No, you weren't mentioned.

GRANT. Rather remiss of her, wasn't it? Do you mind if I smoke? [*Taking case from pocket.*] You know I can think so much better with a cigar. And it's time we had a good long talk about things. I don't seem to have seen anything of you lately, what with being away, and one thing and another. [*Lights cigar. Takes one or two puffs.*] Well, Mary?

MRS HAMILTON. Well?

GRANT. So it's all over now.

MRS HAMILTON. Yes, it is all over.

GRANT. It's a funny game. This time last year, if anyone had told me I should be fool enough to get landed like this on a single count I'd have laid 1000 to 1 against it. But who's the sportsman who says that all the worst croppers happen at the low hedges? Stevenson, wasn't it? Well, that was the lowest hedge I ever negotiated. Pretty rotten for you too, my dear. I'd give a fiver for the chance to wring that chambermaid's neck. It's always the people you pay who pay you out in the long run, isn't it? It seems to me the lower classes have us under their thumb all the time. [*Mary makes a movement of impatience.*] What's the matter? Come and sit down.

MRS HAMILTON. No, thank you. I'm only waiting to hear what you came to say to me.

GRANT. Why, you're not going to turn me out, are you? No need to lock the stable door now, you know. Ha! ha! By Jove. I expect you're tired though, aren't you?

MRS HAMILTON. No. I'm all right.

GRANT. Barnard advises me to appeal. Eight hundred's a bit stiff, you know—and costs. It'll run me into something like twelve hundred before it's through. But I think it's better to cut at the first loss and let the whole dam business blow over, the sooner the better. Don't you?

MRS HAMILTON. Doubtless you know best.

GRANT. Oh, you've got the last edition. Let's see what they say. [*Strolls to table, takes paper and sits down again.*] Pretty full report. Must have been that short, dark-haired chap. He

seemed to be doing all the work, sitting next to the man who was sketching you. [*Mary shudders.*] You know, they ought not to put all this stuff into the papers. It's nobody's dam business except ours.

MRS HAMILTON. You feel it's bad for public morality?

GRANT. Of course it is. Rotten! Papers ought to be prohibited from printing all this tosh. Makes one seem such a silly ass too! Things always look worse in print. What I always say is that the publication of these divorce cases, police-court stories and inquests, only panders to the morbid instincts of the mob and does nobody any good except the newspaper proprietors. Just listen to this:—"Butcher murders wife and four children. Back parlour a perfect shambles. Ghastly description by eye-witness." And this:—"Woman's fatal leap from top-floor window. Pathetic farewell letter. 'It's all so unfair,' writes deceased, who had just lost her situation." And so on. Now what's the good of harrowing people's feelings like that? One can't do anything. I'm bothered if I can understand.

[*During foregoing Mrs Hamilton has been restlessly wandering about the room. She suddenly stands still.*]

MRS HAMILTON. Oh, for goodness' sake, be quiet! Be quiet! You'll drive me mad.

GRANT. What's the matter?

MRS HAMILTON. You go on talking, talking, talking, just for the sake of talking about a lot of things

that are quite beside the mark at the present moment, while I—I—I—oh! [*Nearly choking.*] Are you so utterly lacking in any sense of decency, of the fitness of things, that you come to me this afternoon and behave and chat as if nothing mattered, as if nothing had happened, whilst I'm living in the depth of hell, tortured by every devil conscience can unloose.

GRANT. Come, come, my dear! Pull yourself together. I know you've had a bad time of it—jolly upsetting for a woman with nerves like you. But you really must control yourself a little. It would be very silly to pick a quarrel with me just now—at the present juncture. I'm not overjoyed with this afternoon's verdict, I can tell you. But still, that's neither here nor there. It's just rotten bad luck, everything coming out like that. Of course you're upset. I can quite understand that. All this beastly publicity and so on is very rough on a nice-minded, refined woman like you.

MRS HAMILTON. Please don't insult me with your pity. I have quite enough to bear.

GRANT. My dear Mary, you may not mean it, but you're really very irritating. It isn't my fault. You don't suppose I wanted all this damned fuss, bother and expense, do you? Of course I know a woman hates scandal and an exposé—when she happens to be the victim. I really am exceedingly sorry for you—

MRS HAMILTON. That will do. You've said quite enough. I suppose you wouldn't understand if I told you that now it's all over, now that

everything is known, I can breathe more freely than any time since—since then. If you knew how many times I wanted to tell my husband, to blurt out the whole truth, how night after night I used to lie awake with the secret burning into my brain while he slept calmly by my side! There were times when I felt it was all a hallucination, an evil dream, that it never really happened, but then the ghastly reality would rush in upon me with its secret burden of shame and misery. Whatever penance I now have to pay it will be an open, not a secret torture. I feel as if, after being stifled in the dark, I have at last got out into the light of day.

GRANT [*sarcastically*]. There's not much doubt about that. But I'm afraid you'll find the light a bit fierce. You haven't been brought up to the glare of notoriety and exposure, my dear. You've got hold of a very queer point of view, my dear. I don't think you'll find there's much in it about a week from now, when you've had time to realize your position. You'll be cut by every woman you know, and made love to by every man. The helpless position of the unfortunate divorcée in modern society makes her the target for all the invective and cruelty peculiar to every grade of British respectability. The woman who, like you, is unlucky, has to pay the wages of sin for the hundreds of others who don't get found out. It's all very well for you to indulge in a lofty attitude and talk in vague abstractions now, but you can take it from me that you'll find it pretty difficult to keep it up.

You're bound to find yourself in some rather tight corners before long, and it won't be very cheerful trying to face the music all by yourself.

MRS HAMILTON. Is that all you came for? To taunt me with my loneliness?

GRANT. Of course not. I want to know what your plans are, what you think of doing.

MRS HAMILTON. That can only be my concern.

GRANT. You're behaving very foolishly to treat me like this. You know perfectly well that you've no one to look to but me. Of course, if you're prepared to eat humble pie and apply to your husband, I don't suppose he'd let you starve exactly.

MRS HAMILTON. Do you imagine that I could touch one penny of his money?

GRANT. Then what are you going to do? What are you going to live on? You've no training, no capacity for earning money. You've no business knowledge, and no respectable people would have you in their homes. You know that. So you see—you really do need someone; you can't afford to stand in your own light. Now don't you realize that you and I have got to pull together for a bit?

MRS HAMILTON. Pull together—you and I?

GRANT. Yes, why not? I think we could manage to rub along very comfortably, don't you?

MRS HAMILTON [*slowly*]. You want me to marry you?

GRANT. Well, I don't think we need be quite so definite as that. In a little while we might each of us have other plans, but just now, for the

present, while we're more or less at a loose end and more or less out of things, it might be a very convenient and pleasant arrangement for both of us. We could go abroad, travel about for a bit, till things blew over. Not a soul need know. What do you say to the idea, h'm? [*He goes to Mrs Hamilton and puts his arm round her. She wrenches herself free and faces him.*]

MRS HAMILTON. So that's why you came to see me, is it? To try and drag me down still further into the mire. Now let me tell you once and for all that I would rather be dead than be anything to you. I regard you as an utter stranger, yet a stranger to whom there clings a foul, unspeakable memory. You stand for my eternal shame. And I hate you, hate you, hate you now, as I believe I've always done.

GRANT. Then all I can say is that you must be a most immoral woman. If you hated me, why the devil did you—

MRS HAMILTON. Why did I—why did I yield to you? You know that as well as I do. You know how, under the guise of friendship, you watched and waited with subtle cunning till you caught me in a moment of loneliness and weakness. Then the practised evil in you called to the dormant evil in me, and it awoke! If you had not called it might have remained asleep always. Why, oh, why could you not have let me alone?

GRANT. There you go again! Getting so excited and letting your ideas run away with you. We only did what hundreds of other people have

done and are doing every day, only we happened to be unlucky—we got found out. That was our only crime.

MRS HAMILTON. Oh, you . . . Ah, well, I suppose you can't help it. You can't, or you won't understand.

GRANT. Oh, yes, I can. I can understand perfectly well. The trouble with you, my dear, is that you've probably had nothing to eat all day and it's making you take an exaggerated view of everything. What you most need at the present moment is nourishment. You want a good square meal. So pull yourself together, pop on your hat and come along out. Be sensible, give me a kiss, and let's have no more tantrums. Come on. [*Goes to Mrs Hamilton.*]

MRS HAMILTON. Don't touch me! Don't come near me!

GRANT. Oh, come, come now!

MRS HAMILTON. If you don't go, if you don't leave me alone, I shall do something desperate—something ugly!

GRANT. Oh, no, you won't. I know you better than that. You've far too much common sense to be melodramatic.

MRS HAMILTON. For God's sake go! I warn you I can't stand much more.

GRANT. Oh, all right, very well. If you're left alone perhaps you'll come to your senses. Good-bye. [*Turning to door.*] Perhaps when you're more reasonable you'll think better of my proposition. If you won't let me help you some other man will. That's the only alternative. [*Exits.*]

MRS HAMILTON [*remains standing for a minute or two as if dazed. Then murmurs.*] He or some other man—any man! Oh, no, not that, not that! [*Shudders, sinks into couch and buries her head in her hands. After a pause she springs up suddenly.*] Oh, I shall go mad, I shall go mad. [*Paces room, stops facing mirror.*] An outcast, a thing of shame! His or another man's! Only fit for that! [*Resumes pacing.*] Oh, it's all some horrible nightmare! Oh, dear good God, can't you make it not true, can't you help me? It's stifling me! [*Catches sight of paper and rushes to table. Reads hurriedly.*] Yes, it's all true, all quite true! [*Gives long, shuddering sob.*] Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do? [*Looks around distractedly. Her gaze falls on paper again. She utters a sudden ejaculation as she catches sight of the report of the suicide previously read by Maurice. Reads.*] "It's all so unfair!" My God, yes! Oh, I wish I weren't such a coward, such a coward! [*Resumes her walk, suddenly stops near door, listening.*] He's coming back! He's coming back to fetch me? Oh, I can't, I can't! What shall I do? Oh, good God, help me to be brave! [*Voices and steps heard outside. She looks at door then goes swiftly into bedroom. Knock at door and Mrs Collins enters, followed by Maurice, who looks flushed and jovial.*]

MRS COLLINS. The gentleman's come back, Mrs 'Amilton. Oh! [*Cordially to Maurice.*] I expect she's in 'er bedroom, sir, a-tidyin' 'erself.

GRANT [*cheerfully*]. Ah, she knew I'd be coming

back for her all right. She knew. [*Confidingly.*] I'm going to take her out to have a nice quiet little dinner. A bottle and a bird, that'll put her right. Food and drink, that's what she wants. You never know what you want till you get it. I didn't know I wanted four special Scotches just now till I had 'em, and now I feel all the better, what! You just go and fetch her out, Mrs Collins, see. Here, half a minute. [*Fumbles in his pocket and brings out half a sovereign.*] There now, you go out and make a fuss of yourself.

MRS COLLINS [*with a cackle of laughter*]. Oh, sir, you're a real gentleman! Thank you, sir.

GRANT. You run and fetch her out now. You womenfolk understand one another. [*Mrs Collins goes to bedroom door and knocks.*] A nice little bottle and a bird, that'll do the trick. Ha, ha! [*Cry heard from bedroom.*] Come along now, what are you shouting about? [*Mrs Collins returns, looking white and terrified.*] Well, where is she?

MRS COLLINS. She ain't there, sir. But the winder's wide open . . . and there's a big crowd in the street!

'ILDA'S HONOURABLE

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

MRS SMITH. *Shopkeeper's widow. Stout and cheerful.*

HILDA. *Her daughter, aged 21. Pretty chorus girl of some refinement.*

HON. EDWARD ADDISON. *Aged 24. Quiet and unassuming.*

SCENE.—*The Smiths' sitting-room.*

TIME.—*The present.*

'ILDA'S HONOURABLE

At rise of curtain Mrs Smith is seen, hot and untidy, in old black dress and felt slippers, bustling around with armful of fans, paper flowers and other bright knick-knacks, which she disposes about the room. It has a riotous air of being en fête. Antimacassars, aspidistras, birdcage, etc., flaunt brightly-coloured bows; vases of paper flowers stand on sideboard and mantelpiece. The floor is covered with plain cork lino. Usual furniture, including a sideboard, couch and table partly laid for tea.

MRS SMITH [*pausing to take breath and looking round with pride*]. There now! That's that! 'Ope I haven't forgotten anything. [*Snatches up duster from chair and wipes her brow with it, leaving dirty smudge.*] Oh! the watercresses! [*Goes hastily to door and stumbles over unfixed join in lino.*] Oh, drat that lino! [*Opening door and calling.*] 'Ere! 'Ilder! 'Ilder!

HILDA [*off*]. Ye-es?

MRS SMITH. Aren't you nearly ready, my dear?
It's just gone three.

HILDA. I won't be a minute, mummy.

MRS SMITH. Well, 'urry up. You don't want to go and keep your young man waiting. [*She turns to give a final glance round room.*] Oh, them coals! [*Hurries to mantelpiece and breathes on glass and proceeds to polish it. Her back is turned to door.*]

HILDA [*enters and stops suddenly, looking round room bewildered.*] Oh, mummy dear! What have you been up to?

MRS SMITH [*starting*]. Oh, for goodness' sake, don't give me the jumps like that! I'm flurried enough as it is.

HILDA. Now then, mummy, you've no business to be worrying and flustering yourself like this, just because a young man's coming to tea. We've had people to tea before.

MRS SMITH. Yes, but not the son of a real lord.

HILDA. Well, that doesn't make any difference. Teddy's just like anybody else.

MRS SMITH. There, there! 'Ow you do talk. Just like one of them Socialists in the Park. 'Ow can 'e be just like anybody else? With 'is mother a real lady?

HILDA. And so's mine, bless her. [*Kissing her.*]

MRS SMITH. Oh, go along with you. Don't talk such nonsense! I can't think where you get your ideas from.

HILDA. But what I want to know is, what have you been doing to the room?

MRS SMITH. Oh, I told you I'd give you a surprise.

HILDA. You *have*.

MRS SMITH. I was going to wait until after you'd gone out, but . . . You see, I thought we ought to make the place look a little more showy for your Mr Honourable. More like what 'e's used to, you know. I 'aven't been extravagant, 'Ilder. I've only spent a few shillings. Most of the things came from Jones & Edward's sale. See this cushion, I only gave one-eleven-three for it because of the stain in the corner. But if you lay it this way—no, this way [*bus.*], it will never be seen. And it looks so cheerful, too.

HILDA. Yes, doesn't it! Why, what's this doing here? [*Pulls out frilly nightdress from under cushion.*]

MRS SMITH [*laughing*]. Oh, you'd never guess! I got all the bows off your new sets to save expense. I can soon run them through again after tea. [*And the 'assock, that was quite cheap too.*] So were the fans. You know you always kept the room much too bare, 'Ilder. Especially for a man. He likes to see a place bright and cheerful. I wish you 'adn't bought this ugly old lino for me to fall over. Just look at it. It nearly tripped me up a minute ago. I hate the sight of it. [*Runs her foot along edge of lino.*] You might just pop into Taylor's on your way to the theatre and tell them if they don't send their young man to nail

it down we'll all 'ave our necks broke one fine day. And I should 'old them responsible, too. They promised to send someone this morning.

HILDA. All right, I'll talk to them.

MRS SMITH. You know, 'Ilder, that nice bright yellow carpet with the blue roses wouldn't 'ave cost much more whilst you were about it. This does look so cheap. So bare. Just like a kitchen.

HILDA. We'll have some more rugs over it some day.

MRS SMITH. I got out them nice stage photos of you and some of your young actress friends. A few photos always makes a room look so refined. Specially those with the autygraphs written on them.

HILDA. I don't think we'll have this one out, mummy dear. [*Putting photo away.*]

MRS SMITH. What! That one of you in *Aladdin* as one of the King's Guards? Don't be so silly. Legs aren't anything to be ashamed of.

HILDA [*glancing at table*]. Why, what a spread you've got! Do you think we really want quite such a lot? Those winkles and things?

MRS SMITH. That's all right, dear. You just leave it to me. A nice 'igh tea with something tasty always looks comfortable and well-to-do. You know. And a man likes to live well. That's what your pore father always used to say. Such

a one for 'is 'ome as 'e was! Ah, well! if your Honourable's only half as good a husband to you, you'll get along all right.

HILDA. Gently, darling, not so quick! Why, we're not even engaged yet, not really. I wouldn't until he'd come here and met you and—and all that.

MRS SMITH. Yes, I know. I do hope I shan't disgrace you, 'Ilder. Of course, you know 'ow to behave yourself in any society—you're like your father—and we scraped up every penny we could to give you an education, but I never had any luck like that. And I'm not a bit used to lords and honourables. [*Brightening.*] But the room's all right anyway. Looks nice enough for anybody. A girl can't 'elp being poor, but 'e'll see at any rate you've got a bit of knack and taste . . . knack and taste. 'Ere, you best 'urry up and get dressed.

HILDA. I *am* dressed, mummy.

MRS SMITH. What! You going to wear that old thing when you got that nice green velvet that you paid such a lot for?

HILDA. Oh, that isn't a bit suitable. It's far too elaborate.

MRS SMITH. Well, I don't know what's coming over girls these days. When your pa was courting me I was never satisfied unless I got something new on each time I met him. And that old grey dress! Why, it isn't doing yourself common justice!

brown

Show him what you can look like in a decent dress.

HILDA. But he's seen me on the stage often enough in all kinds of expensive frocks; besides I really haven't time to change now. What are you going to put on, mummy?

MRS SMITH. Not an old ^{brown} grey rag, miss, I can tell you.

HILDA [*anxiously*]. Oh, dear, do tell me! What are you going to wear?

MRS SMITH. Never you mind. That's my secret. But you shan't be ashamed of your old mother's looks, whatever you may be of her accent. I can't always be thinkin' about my aitches when I'm busy.

HILDA. Oh, do tell me what you're going to wear.
[*Goes up and throws her arms round her mother.*]
Now do.

MRS SMITH. No!

HILDA. Have you been a wicked, extravagant, naughty mummy, buying new clothes to dazzle a poor young man with?

MRS SMITH. Well, after all, this is an extra special occasion.

HILDA. You have! I know you have! Now let me see. Quick!

MRS SMITH [*pulling out box from under couch.*] What a one you are! Always getting your own way. There now! [*She takes out a very fierce bright satin dress and holds it up.*] There!

HILDA. Oh, dear!

MRS SMITH. What do you think of that, eh? I didn't mean you to see it till I get it on and you'd come back with your Honourable.

HILDA. But are you really going to put that on, mummy? I mean—must you?

MRS SMITH. Of course I must. That's why I bought it. What's the matter with it anyway? It's all right, isn't it? [*Holds dress up against herself to show it off and turns round.*]

HILDA. Of course. Only—only—won't you be afraid of spoiling it, wearing it about the house? You see, it's so *delicate*, isn't it? Why not wear your black silk?

MRS SMITH. My black silk? Pooh! I can wear that any day. Look 'ere, I'll pin it up, 'Ilder, then I shan't drop anything on it. But I'm not going to let him think we don't know what's what, even if we do live over an oil shop for convenience.

HILDA [*stroking her face*]. Oh, you dear, quaint, old mother!

MRS SMITH [*looking round*]. Bless me! Don't that 'ole in the sofa show bad? And the stuffin's all coming out, too. I know what, I'll fetch that old fur rug from the bedroom; that'll cover it up. Just thrown over careless.

[*Exits. Left alone, Hilda hastily collects some of the fans, antimacassars, etc. Then stands, looks troubled, slowly replaces them.*]

MRS SMITH [*enters*]. There! looks just as if you'd brought it up from your motor and thrown it down careless like. Now you run along. Don't keep the Honourable waiting. I'll 'ave the tea all ready by the time you get back. Don't suppose you'll be here much before four. I'll just cut my bread-and-butter and then get tidy. Good-bye, my dear. I'll try to be ladylike—I will really. I'll do my best—

HILDA [*kissing her*]. Good-bye, dearest little mum. Now don't worry about anything. Nothing matters, really. [*Exits.*]

MRS SMITH [*calling after her*]. You can leave the front door on the jar for the milkman. [*She puts a few extra touches to room and tea-table. Catches foot again in lino. Seized with a sudden idea, she runs to window, which she opens and leans out of, calling*]. 'Ilder! 'Ilder! Oh, 'Ilder, don't forget about the lino man, will you? Tell them he must come round and tack it at once. That's right. [*Shuts window.*]

[*Gives final look round and exits, leaving door open. After a few seconds the Hon. Edward Addison appears in doorway. He hesitates, coughs, then comes in and looks round. He is plainly dressed in an old lounge suit. He stumbles over join in lino and stoops down to see what is the matter. Mrs Smith enters briskly with tea-tray, bread-and-butter and watercress.*]

MRS SMITH. Oh, lor'! What a start you give me.

HON. E. ADDISON. I'm so sorry. The door was open, so I walked in, you see, and . . .

MRS SMITH. But I'm glad you've come at last. You're just in time, too. You can get the lino tacked down as quick as ever you like. We're expectin' company, very important company. 'Ere's the knee-pads the other man left. And the nails. You've got your own hammer, 'aven't you?

HON. E. ADDISON. Well . . . er . . . no. You see . . . er—as a matter of fact, I—

MRS SMITH. We 'aven't got one neither. So you'll 'ave to do the best you can with our flat iron. Why didn't you come sooner?

HON. E. ADDISON. Oh, but it's only twenty to four.

MRS SMITH. Well, that doesn't give much time, does it? But if you look sharp you'll just do it.

HON. E. ADDISON. I'll do my best.

MRS SMITH. You'll 'ave to be out of the place before four, you know. Before my daughter gets back—

HON. E. ADDISON. Oh, but shan't I see her?

MRS SMITH. No, young man, you won't. I'm going to attend to you. There now, let me see, you're waiting for the flat iron. [*Going out.*] My daughter's very much engaged this afternoon, I can tell you.

[*Exits. Hon. E. Addison looks round in*

bewilderment. Goes to photographs on mantel-piece, picks one up, gazes at it, then kisses it. Mrs Smith returns with iron whilst he is holding photo.]

MRS SMITH. Now then! Steady on, young man. What are you up to? You're 'ere to do a bit of work. [*Softening.*] D'you know who that is?

HON. E. ADDISON. Well, I . . .

MRS SMITH. I'll tell you. That's Miss 'Ilder Molyneux—my daughter. She's at the Piccadilly Theatre. You see, our name's Smith really, but you couldn't 'elp that, and so . . . 'ere, I say, young man—sparkle up and nail that lino down.

HON. E. ADDISON. Oh, yes, of course. I'd just love to . . .

MRS SMITH. Well, 'ere's the iron. Think you can bang the nails in with that all right? Why, I've 'ung pictures with it! Be as quick as you can, won't you? It wants tacking right along from the wall.

HON. E. ADDISON. Oh, yes, I see. [*Seizes nails and iron and kneels down.*]

MRS SMITH. 'Ere! 'Old 'ard! Where are those pads I give you? I lay your mother's got enough to do without 'aving to mend your trousers.

HON. E. ADDISON [*laboriously ties on large felt knee-pads and hesitates*]. There now! How's that?

MRS SMITH. Well, now, what are you waiting for?

HON. E. ADDISON. Ah! [*Considering the problem.*]

Well, we must first stick some nails in, mustn't we? I say, would you like your nails in a straight line—a more or less straight line, that is—or in a pattern? They'd make a nice pattern, I think.

MRS SMITH. Pattern!

HON. E. ADDISON. Yes. You can get very decorative effects from the repetition of simple forms. The Greek Key, for instance, is only a series of squares, while the Swastika device is simpler still.

MRS SMITH. Swastika device be blowed! Just you set about it and swastika those tacks in. Don't talk so much.

HON. E. ADDISON. All right. I'll just do them in a straight line.

MRS SMITH. Yes, you'd better. [*Pause, during which Hon. E. Addison awkwardly knocks in some nails.*]

HON. E. ADDISON. There! How's that? Not bad for a start, eh?

MRS SMITH. Don't be so chatty, or you won't finish it by supper-time, let alone in time for tea. Now hurry up!

HON. E. ADDISON. Oh, this won't take long. [*Works briskly and then hits his finger.*] Oh, hang!

MRS SMITH. Now, what's the matter?

HON. E. ADDISON. I've hit my finger.

MRS SMITH. Let's see. Does it hurt much? Here, you put my handkerchief round it. That'll keep it from swelling.

HON. E. ADDISON [*takes handkerchief and quickly rolls it round his finger*]. Thanks, that's great.

MRS SMITH. Now be careful. Don't do it again.

HON. E. ADDISON. You bet I shan't.

MRS SMITH. I say, do you reckon this lino wears well?

HON. E. ADDISON. Oh, I should think so. Rather!

MRS SMITH. Well, of course you're bound to say that, aren't you? Your people wouldn't keep you long if you didn't. But what I want to know is, do they use it themselves? That's the point.

HON. E. ADDISON. I . . . er . . . I'm afraid I've never noticed . . . Oh, yes, of course, I'm sure we do.

MRS SMITH. The other young man told me they were putting it down in all the best families. He said these neuter-coloured linos were so artistic because they didn't show up the dirt.

HON. E. ADDISON. Yes, I suppose that is an advantage—

MRS SMITH. It was my daughter's idea, really. I don't care so much for it myself, looks so bare I say. Now there was a really nice yellow carpet with blue roses all over it at one-nineteen-and-six . . . But there now, look at the time! And I'm not dressed yet. Well, I'll have to leave you to finish by yourself.

[It occurs to her that the young man ought not to be left alone with the valuables in room. She hastily goes to table and collects spoons and silver teapot. Looks round room anxiously.]

'Ow long d'you think you'll be before you're done? I don't think it wants such a lot of tacks. Be such a bother to get up again. You'll 'ave to cut that end bit off, won't you? It'll stick out over.

HON. E. ADDISON. Oh, do I? Right-ho! *[Awkwardly proceeds to cut at lino with his penknife.]*

MRS SMITH. Be careful now!

HON. E. ADDISON. Oh, I say! I'm most awfully sorry. The knife slipped. I've cut too much.

MRS SMITH. Oh, dear, oh, lor'! Oh, won't 'Ilder be upset! I don't know what she'll say! So pleased with her lino she was too.

HON. E. ADDISON. I'm frightfully sorry!

MRS SMITH. Well, it's done now. But don't you get the 'abit of going round people's 'ouses cutting up their lino.

HON. E. ADDISON. But you see . . . I've never done it before . . .

MRS SMITH. Then take my advice and don't do it again, that's all I say. I wish it didn't show so.

HON. E. ADDISON. I'll tell you what, we'll have a new piece down, then it will be all right.

MRS SMITH. Well, if you think your people 'won't make a fuss.

HON. E. ADDISON. Oh, they won't know.

MRS SMITH. But they ought to.

HON. E. ADDISON. Oh, it won't come out of their pockets, leave that to me. I'll . . .

MRS SMITH. But I don't like you to have to pay for it. You ain't made of money, any more than we are.

HON. E. ADDISON. Oh, that's all right. I'll have it sent up and laid properly to-morrow.

MRS SMITH. But what about this afternoon?

HON. E. ADDISON. I know. Let's put this rug over it. You don't need it on the couch. There! That's fine—priceless!

MRS SMITH. Ah, but now the Honourable will see the 'ole!

HON. E. ADDISON. The who? The what?

MRS SMITH. The Honourable. 'Ilder's Honourable. The young man she's keepin' company with. It's my daughter, you see. She's got a young Honourable gone on her.

[Hon. E. Addison takes off pads, rolls them up, picks up tacks, spills them again—bus.]

Wants to marry 'er too. But she won't make any pretence with 'im. 'E's got to come 'ere and see 'er mother and what we're like and 'ow we live, before she'll 'ave anything settled. I've done my best, so she needn't be ashamed of 'er 'ome, but 'eavens only knows what 'is Royal 'Ighness will think of me. You see, I've never been presented at Court. I've got a smart new dress though and I shan't talk much. But if

you're bred and born in the retail fish, wet and dry, in London, you can't 'elp 'avin' a Cockney accent.

HON. E. ADDISON. Oh, people don't trouble about accents nowadays.

MRS SMITH. Ah, but my ways—they must seem different to 'is ma's. She's a real lady, you see. I've never 'ad time to learn party manners as you might say. I was against 'er bringin' 'im 'ome from the very first, and what with one thing and another, I'm getting that nervous. I do wish you 'adn't made them 'oles in the lino. I'll be thinkin' of it all the time!

HON. E. ADDISON. When do you expect him?

MRS SMITH. Well, you see, she was to meet him at 'er theatre at 'alf-past three, and then they'd get here about four.

HON. E. ADDISON. Oh, he was to meet her at the theatre—not here?

MRS SMITH. That's right. I say, you do look 'ot! What do you say to a cup of tea? There's just time. They won't be 'ere for another ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. The kettle's on the boil.

HON. E. ADDISON. Oh, I'd love it. I say, can I help?

MRS SMITH. No, it's all in here ready. I'm not going to tell any stories to 'Ilder's Honourable, but I thought I could just say the servant was out—and that's *quite* true, we never 'ad one.
[*Making tea.*]

HON. E. ADDISON. Oh, he wouldn't bother, anyway. It's much jollier doing your own work, I should think.

MRS SMITH. Is it? One 'ud think you'd never done any to 'ear you talk. Now come on. You sit down 'ere. 'Ere's the ^{table} ~~Mirror~~ so's to keep the cloth clean. There! Now sit down and make yourself at 'ome for a minute. [*Pouring out tea.*] I suppose you wouldn't know much about Honourables, would you, young man?

HON. E. ADDISON [*sitting with his back to door*]. Oh, well . . . I have come across one or two, don't you know . . .

MRS SMITH. No! Not really! 'Ave you? That is lucky, because p'r'aps you can tell me something I want to know. I didn't like to ask 'Ilder, it 'ud only make 'er feel more anxious about me. Now look 'ere, what did I ought to call 'im? 'Ilder, you see, she calls 'im Teddy, but I couldn't, now could I? It 'ud be taking such a liberty. I've lain awake at nights thinking about it, and I can't decide whether I best say "Your Honourable" or just the "Hon. Edward," like it's printed. What do you say?

HON. E. ADDISON. You'd much better just call him Teddy, like your daughter does. You'll have to later, you know.

MRS SMITH. I'm not so sure. When 'e comes 'ere and sees I'm no lady, only just a pore 'umble woman . . . well, 'e won't like it, will 'e?

HON. E. ADDISON. Good heavens! What sort of a silly ass do you think he is?

MRS SMITH. Sh! sh! We mustn't talk like that of 'Ilder's Honourable. 'E's a very nice young man, else my girl wouldn't 'ave taken to 'im. And she's very keen on 'im, I can tell you. Never took any notice of them young men before, always kept 'erself to 'erself. She'll break 'er 'eart if 'e throws 'er over. But there, what I say is, class is class. You can't deny that. [*Pause.*] Of course, I'll 'ave my new dress on, but I'm bound to seem different to his own ma.

HON. E. ADDISON. Anyway, she couldn't be kinder.

MRS SMITH. Look 'ere, I'll show you something. [*Gets up and rummages in sideboard drawer, she produces copy of The Queen.*] See, 'ere's 'is mother and sister. [*Reading.*] "Lady Mary Addison, in the white brocade gown she wore at the recent Drawing-Room." That's 'is mother with the tirara on. Isn't she lovely? Well now, I couldn't look like that, now could I? 'Ilder could. But I couldn't, not if I'd got six tiraras on my 'ead. So what's 'e going to think of 'is mother-in-law if 'e marries my daughter.

HON. E. ADDISON. I think you're a dear!

MRS SMITH [*astonished*]. What say?

HON. E. ADDISON. Don't be offended. I say, I think you're a dear!

MRS SMITH. Ah, well, it's very nice of you to say so, but I'm afraid the Honourable won't. Of course, if they was to fix things up—in spite of me—I wouldn't dream of intruding on them. I'd know my place all right. [*Sniffs.*] Ah, well! Another cup?

HON. E. ADDISON. Yes, please. And lots, lots of sugar.

MRS SMITH. There now! I do like to see folks making themselves at 'ome. But aren't you eating anything?

HON. E. ADDISON. I didn't know whether I ought to. You never asked me, you know. What will you have?

MRS SMITH. I might as well. I'd be too frightened to eat in front of the Honourable anyway. Give me one of those Victoria buns. 'Ave one yourself. They're 'ome made.

HON. E. ADDISON [*eating*]. Jolly good too. Did you make them?

MRS SMITH. Of course. Do you think we keep a chef? We've got a little gas oven, you see, and that cooks very well. Especially when you're just the two of you and no servant to waste the gas. I'd always have a gas oven. So reliable. You're not married, are you?

HON. E. ADDISON. No, but I hope to be soon.

MRS SMITH. Nice girl who knows 'ow to make a 'ome comfortable, I 'ope?

HON. E. ADDISON. Her mother does.

MRS SMITH. Ah, then you're all right. That's what I always says, young man. See what sort of a family the girl comes from. What sort of a mother. Well then, you take my advice and 'ave a gas stove. Are you 'andy about the 'ouse?

HON. E. ADDISON. Why, yes. I can knock in nails with anyone.

MRS SMITH. Ah, that's useful. A man can be such a 'elp about the 'ouse, or such a 'indrance. I 'alf wish my girl 'ad found a nice 'omely young man like you. She'd be much 'appier, even if 'e did earn 'is living going round cutting up folks' lino.

[Door opens suddenly and Hilda enters.]

HILDA. I don't know what's happened. I waited and waited, but he didn't turn up.

MRS SMITH. Well, he knows your address! He'll come along by himself all right. Cool! Look at the time! Four o'clock! I must run and change. Oh, 'ilder, this is the young man about the lino.

HILDA *[seeing Hon. E. Addison's face]*. Teddy!

MRS SMITH. What's that?

HILDA. Why, it's Teddy!

MRS SMITH. Teddy! Your Honourable! 'Im! And I made 'im lay the lino! Oh! *[Collapses.]*

HON. E. ADDISON. Please forgive me. I thought at first you were treating me as one of the family. Then I saw the mistake. But you were so kind to the young man from Taylor's and you threatened to be so haughty to your future son-in-law, that I didn't dare tell you the truth. I thought I'd wait till Hilda came back to protect me.

MRS SMITH. Well, of all the . . . Oh, dear, oh, dear!

and to think I ordered 'im about and called 'im
“ young man.” I did, 'Ilder.

HON. E. ADDISON. Yes, and we've had a nice cosy
little chat and everything's all right, and now
let's have a jolly tea.

MRS SMITH [*half rising*]. But I must slip into my
other dress. [*Both push her down on either side.*]

HILDA [*kissing her*]. No, mummy dear, we like you
best just as you are.

HON. E. ADDISON. Yes, mummy dear, just as you
are.

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